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TITLE: Implementing HIV Policy Guidelines in Statewide Substance Abuse Treatment Programs

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ISSUE: There is a high correlation between a client history of drug and alcohol abuse and HIV risk behavior. Drug and alcohol treatment programs have a critical role to play in curbing the transmission of HIV and accessing services for those already infected. Substance abuse treatment programs continually express the need for direction and current information around the incorporation of HIV education, prevention and treatment in their settings.

SETTING: The Massachusetts HIV/AIDS Policy Guidelines provide a framework for the implementation of sound HIV/AIDS policies and practices in substance abuse treatment programs across the commonwealth.

PROJECT: To address the need for direction and updated information, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health developed the HIV/AIDS Policy Guidelines for Substance Abuse Treatment Program. These guidelines are the underpinnings for the work of SPHERE, the Statewide Program for HIV Education in Recovery Environments, which provides training and technical assistance to substance abuse treatment programs. SPHERE revises the HIV/AIDS Policy Guidelines annually, in response to advances in the diagnosis and treatment of HIV disease, shifting socio-political environments and the increasing demand for access to comprehensive substance abuse treatment services.

RESULTS: The revision process provided the opportunity for HIV and substance abuse treatment providers, along with representatives from the Department of Public Health, to come together and jointly determine the content of the HIV/AIDS Policy Guidelines. The HIV/AIDS Policy Guidelines have been found to be an essential tool for providers in their advocacy for and implementation of effective HIV policies and practices in their settings.

LESSONS LEARNED: Our experience thus far suggests that HIV and substance abuse treatment providers want to work with one another in assisting the state in determining effective policy guidelines for their programs. This revision process provides a forum for collaborations between key decision-makers and their constituents, as well as among HIV and substance abuse providers, which otherwise do not exist

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